DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 992 HE 017 847

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TITLE Developing an Information and Records Management Program.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 6p.
AVAILABLE FROM NACUBO, One Dupont Circle, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20036.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Business Officer; p35-38 Nov 1984

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *College Administration; Data Collection; Higher Education; *Information Processing; *Management Information Systems; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *Quality Control; *Recordkeeping
IDENTIFIERS *Records Management

ABSTRACT

The need for information controls for college records management programs and the elements of program organization, planning, and management are discussed. Conditions at institutions that indicate a flaw in information control are identified, along with the benefits of a sound records management program. The management of an information and records management program requires a program coordinator. The planning of a successful program begins with an understanding of an institution's organizational structure, including the relationships between offices and their respective functions. Also needed are a records review committee, survey forms for the collection of document data, and a timetable for surveying institutional offices. The processes of inventorying, reviewing, and auditing documents are essential in the establishment of a sound records management system. Another goal is to prevent unnecessary data from being produced. Retention and disposition schedules are the foundation of a successful records management program. These schedules are formulated on the principle that documents are removed from offices when they are no longer active. Each office should be audited at least once a year, regardless of the amount of information it generates, disburses, and retains. (SW)

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# Developing an Information and Records Management Program

by JULI G. RUTLEDGE and ALEXIA M. KARTIS

Although the federal government recognized the importance of procedural disposition and retention of records with the passage of the Federal Records Act of 1950, the dearth of literature describing such procedures for higher education institutions suggests that there has been little effort to control scientifically the flow of recorded information. Yet information control is vital to the operation of every organization. The necessity for this control prompts administrators to search continually for more efficient and effective methods of records management.

Do any of these situations seem familiar?

1. The institution is funding automated information management systems, but little improvement has been seen in the flow and retrieval of information.

2. Information costs are rising because of the purchases of computing and microfilm technologies.

3. The creation of unnecessary data is causing increased costs.

4. Storage space is limited and unorganized, resulting in personnel time being lost in the effort to retrieve records.

5. There is no uniform system for destroying obsolete information.

6. Essential documentation for legal and fiscal requirements cannot be located.

7. There are no duplicate copies of vital institutional records. (A vital record is one that is essential for the operation of the institution.)

The presence of any one of these situations indicates a flaw in information control.

Information control and informed decisionmaking should not be assumed with the acquisition or operation of the most up-to-date information management system. The system itself cannot compensate for a lack of coordination between the information producer and the user, nor can it prevent the production and/or retention of unnecessary data.

Information control is further hampered by the fact that most institutions have no established timetable for the destruction of records, thereby causing the accumulation of documents and creating storage problems. Ironically, the problems have been exacerbated by computer technology, which encourages the generation of multiple copies. The accumulation of copies of paper documents and other forms of recorded information in offices, attics, and basements is creating health and safety hazards. And those records are usually considered by employees to be "lost" or inaccessible.

Incomplete data documentation and the absence of a document catalog can force an institution to a standstill, especially if it is unable, for example, to complete federal, state, or local government forms required for funding.

The lack of information controls as described above can be rectified with a sound records management program. Such a program offers the following results:

1. Evaluation of institutional data to determine those that are valuable, for whom and when they are valuable, and the most efficient methods of retention;

2. Retention policies for all records created and held by the institution;

3. Reduction of data production costs;

4. Recycling of filing equipment, computer tapes, and storage space;

5. Reduction in the cost of storage;

6. Creation of a document catalog to facilitate information accessibility;

7. Security of essential records;

8. Accurate documentation to fulfill the institution's fiscal and legal responsibilites;

9. Creation of a timetable for the destruction of obsolete records; and

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10. Documentation of the institution's history.

An overview of the process of organizing an information and records management program is presented below. Planning and operational procedures are examined and the continuing benefits of a properly administered program are identified.

## Program Organization And Planning

The management of an information and records management program requires a program coordinator. An individual external to the institution or an individual currently employed by the institution may be hired—the unique circumstances of an organization will determine that choice. Most higher education institutions have archivists who may be suitable for the job if some additional training is provided prior to the assumption of all records management duties and responsibilities. If no individual on campus has sufficient background knowledge of records management, it is advisable to hire a records management consultant to train the coordinator and establish procedure. Training may range from three to six months. The initial expense of hiring a consultant can be offset by the savings accrued through an efficient records management program. Two national organizations, the Institute of Certified Records Managers (ICRM) and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA), can provide lists of consultants.

The installation of a records management program must be planned carefully to avoid costly procedural mistakes. The coordinator's first task is to plan the entire records management program. The planning of a successful program begins with a thorough understanding of an institution's organizational structure, including the relationships between offices and their respective functions. Organizational charts and interviews with division and department heads are valuable sources of this information.

Support and cooperation from the institution's administration, middle management, and staff are prerequisites for a successful records management program. Once plans for the establishment of the program have been prepared, the coordinator can alert all personnel to the new program through presentations and meetings that describe the program's goals and benefits.

The initial budget for a records management program might cover only supplies plus salaries for the coordinator, a clerical staff person, and two or three student assistants. It should be noted that a records program on a "shoestring" budget may not be able to support the procedures necessary for maximum efficiency. The coordinator must develop a budget that will accommodate the changing scope of the program.

Once the groundwork has been completed, the coordinator must form a records review committee, develop survey forms for the collection of document data, and establish a timetable for surveying all offices within the institution.

The records review committee should function as the liaison between the records management program and the institution. The coordinator should chair the committee, which should be composed of the archivist (to review records for historical value), the auditor (to review records for fiscal value),the attorney (to review records for legal value), and all division heads or their respective representatives. The responsibility for records retention is shared. The records coordinator has access to every office on campus, and documents information is transmitted to the program and from the program.

The most appropriate method for gathering document data must be determined by the program coordinator. The following questions should be asked by the coordinator as he or she attempts to establish which data-gathering method is likely to produce the smallest number of errors.

1. Should all offices be surveyed concurrently or over time, department by department?

2. Who should conduct the survey—records staff or individual office personnel?

If an institution has a small records management staff or numerous offices, or both, it is advisable to have each office conduct its own supervised survey. Office personnel can be trained in these procedures by records staff. The degree of accuracy of the date may not be as high as if the survey were conducted by trained records management staff, but with close supervision the office staff should gather information of value for the records review committee. Records management efforts should focus on those areas that generate and disburse vast amounts of information such as the accounting, personnel services, and student records offices. Poor information flow or problems with documentation in any one of these areas can negatively affect the operation of the entire institution.

A records survey questionnaire must include, but is not limited to, the following items.

1. Records series title and inclusive dates.

2. Form of series (paper, tape, film, etc.).

3. Volume.

4. Nature of the copy (official or duplicate).

5. Location(s).

6. Function to which it relates.

7. Value to the institution (administrative, legal, financial, and/or historical).

8. Point in the record series where the information within is no longer needed for instant retrieval.

9. Location of duplicate copies of the record series and identification of other record series where the same information can be found.

## Preventive Management

The knowledge and experience gained by the coordinator through the processes of inventorying, reviewing, and auditing documents are essential in the establishment of a sound records management sys-

tem. A comprehensive program also strives to prevent unnecessary data from ever being produced. This goal is a logical extension of the management program. The standards that guide decisions regarding the necessity of data generation can be found in records inventory forms and the established policies and regulations of the records review committee.

The records coordinator approaches the task by examining reports, forms, and correspondence generated by the institution. Is the information necessary? Are all copies necessary? Are the same data gathered by several offices? The answers to these questions and others will enable the institution to reduce the production and distribution costs of information by generating only necessary information and distributing it to those offices requiring it. An organizationwide records management system can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of information flow.

## Program Retention and Disposition Schedules

Retention and disposition schedules are the foundation of a successful records management program and they are formulated on the principle that documents are removed from offices when they are no longer active.

If records are inventoried properly, the records review committee will be able to assign retention and disposition schedules to the various types or "series" of records. Schedules should define the particular records series, list the documents included, and state the length of time each document should be retained, how each should be stored during the retention period, and the plans for final dispostion. Schedules should be in written form, should be readily available to all offices, and should designate the lifespans of documents and their copies. Inclusion of the retention period for all copies decreases the problem of unnecessary accumulation of obsolete records.

A significant benefit of the disposition of records is that facilites and space are recycled, saving funds that would otherwise be allocated for additional equipment and storage. The removal of records releases computer memory, tapes, filing equipment, and office space for newly created or received records. Another benefit of a controlled approach to information handling is that no one individual decides what information to retain and what to discard.

If information is obsolete, it is destroyed; if it is no longer needed in the office yet has value to the institution, it is removed from the office and housed in a records center or archives. The actual physical movement of records from offices into holding areas or archives begins with the records audit.

## Records Audit

The records retention and disposition schedule is the authorization for the records audit. Those offices that produce a large volume of records should have their documents audited several times a year. In other offices a single annual audit will suffice. Each office should be audited at least once a year, regardless of the amount of information it generates, disburses, and retains. Such a procedure establishes a cycle in which the management of documents is closely monitored. As documents are removed from offices and from computer memory, equipment and physical space are released for newly created information.

The records audit should be supervised closely by the records program coordinator the first several times it is conducted within a particular office. He or she can make the program operational and can train office staff to conduct the procedure in subsequent audits.

During this phase of the program the retention and disposition schedules determine if records are to be moved or destroyed. There are three proper ways to remove inactive records from an office. First, obsolete records are destroyed. Second, if part of a record series is referred to less than once a month yet is valuable to the institution it is transferred to a records center. For example, expired grants documents must be retained until completion of the fiscal audit, but they do not require storage within the generating office. Such records should be kept in cheaper storage until they can be destroyed. Third, records can be stored in archives, which provide special care for information deemed to be of permanent value to the institution. In some organizations, permanent records are kept in records centers before their final transfer to the archives. The transfer procedure will depend on the physical location of facilities and the needs of the institution. Permanent records should be maintained in accordance with archival standards.

## Storage Facilities

Recorded information deposited in archives and records centers must be easily and quickly retrievable. It must be secure, and in the case of permanent documents it must be maintained according to generally accepted archival standards as to controls for climate, temperature, vermin, and dust.

The size of the records center and archives will vary with the needs and resources of the institution. Nevertheless, certain procedures are essential for their effective operation. For example, all records placed in these facilities must be indexed. Furthermore, records retrieved by offices on campus must be returned promptly and refiled.

## Information Sources

The Institute of Certified Records Managers certifies persons who have a college degree, three years of experience, and a passing grade on a rigorous examination. The Association of Records Managers and Administrators is a professional support group for persons working in the information and records management fields. Both organizations can provide fledgling records management programs with information and the names of professional managers (ICRM, P.O. Box 89, Washington, D.C. 20044, and ARMA, 4200 Somerset Drive, Suite 215, Prairie Village, KS 66209). ♦

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legal service, or an optimum method of obtaining it, for the institutions they lead. The old approach of simply finding a competent attorney in whom administrators have confidence, then purchasing as much service as the institution can afford, has proven less and less adequate as legal needs have become more pervasive and complex. Presidents, trustees, and lawyers have consequently begun increasingly to search for comparative data about the provision of legal services, relatively more objective than subjective in nature. This survey is the first national effort to meet this demand.

"In a nutshell, the survey indicates that the typical senior attorney for a college or university has been engaged in law practice for more than 22 years and has represented the institution as principal attorney for nearly 12 years. The institution he or she represents is likely to enroll about 12,000 students and have a budget of $114.3 million. The principal attorney has a 53 percent chance of being outside counsel rather than in-house counsel, but the odds are changing fast.

"If the principal attorney heads a full-time in-house legal office, it will typically include two or more lawyers, more than one secretary, and perhaps a part-time law clerk or paralegal to provide assistance. The average budget for such an office will be about $178,000 or just under 0.2 percent of the institution's total operating budget. Because of the institution's size, there will be a need to utilize outside, specialized legal services costing about $127,000 per year (primarily for bond matters, complex litigation, patent matters, and tort defenses). The average total cost of legal services for most such institutions will therefore be about $305,000, or just under 0.3 percent of the institution's total operating budget.

"It is especially interesting to convert this figure to hourly expenses which may be compared with costs for outside counsel. Assuming the average staff of in-house attorneys accumulates 4,043 working hours per year (2.75 attorneys at 40 hours per week less three weeks vacation and 25 percent of time spent in administrative duties equivalent to nonbillable time in law firms) and is supported by a typically staffed and funded office, the working cost to the institution for its attorney staff is about $44 per hour of attorney time—half the typical average hourly cost of outside counsel. [This does not include 'overhead,' however, which may be substantial.]

"Assuming further that any work referred to outside counsel is billed at the typical average rate (see next paragraph), 1,532 additional hours of legal service will be obtained, for a total of 5,575 hours of paid attorney services altogether. The total cost of legal services for most institutions of this kind will thus constitute about 0.3 percent of the institution's total budget.

"If the principal attorney is in private practice, he or she will typically have more than three partners or associates to assist in regularly providing service to the institution. The institution will be billed at a rate just under $100 per hour for the principal attorney's service, just under $90 per hour for other partners, and just over $60 per hour for associates. The institution is therefore likely to spend about $57,500 for legal service in a normal year. Assuming equal work by all attorneys—partners and associates—and payments to the firm at the average of all billing rates, the institution will be billed for 693.4 hours of legal service. [This does not consider *pro bono* (unbilled) service, which in some instances is substantial.] For most institutions using outside counsel exclusively, legal service will therefore average only 0.05 percent of the institution's total budget.

"It should be emphasized that while institutions having house counsel typically make significantly greater use of legal services than those represented primarily by outside counsel, and the average cost per hour for house counsel is about half that for outside counsel, this comparison is hardly ever the sole measure of cost-effectiveness for legal services. The relative advantages of in-house and outside counsel were examined at at NACUA conference ten years ago. Observations made at that time remain pertinent and bear emphasizing here:

*"Outside counsel are usually able to:*

"1. be more knowledgeable and adept in matters of courtroom practice and procedure;

"2. have ready access to more extensive legal library facilities (although this distinction is less significant with the advent of computer-assisted legal research;

"3. marshal more lawyers for matters of crisis;

"4. provide specialists for skilled consultation on highly specialized matters of law;

"5. provide the higher incomes required to recruit and retain talent in law firms.

*" In-house legal counsel are usually able to.*

"1. know the client's needs best, particulary in matters of governance and policy;

"2. be more readily available for consultation;

"3. provide institutional continuity and depth of experience in handling problems of a recurring nature;

"4. be more effective in marshaling governmental assistance and in handling matters of administrative law and procedure;

"5. provide more knowledgeable guidance in planning steps to prevent legal problems in institutional matters.

"It seems frankly evident that a combination of inside and outside counsel will provide optimum legal service, but the "mix" may best be determined by college and university administrators with the advice of their own counsel and with careful reference to outside information, including comparisons with practices of similar institutions.

"It is the strong hope [NACUA] that the data here will be of assistance to all institutions in making broad comparisons and in anticipating levels of cost associated with needed services. Since this report is designed to report on the broadest possible national basis, however, we urge care in its application to highly specialized or local circumstances. If it has the value intended, its merits will lie in its generality rather than in isolated particulars."

# business officer

Newsmagazine of the National Association of College and University Business Officers



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*Business Officer* (ISSN 0147-877X) is published monthly by NACUBO, One Dupont Circle, Suite 510, Washington, DC 20036, telephone 202-861-2500. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC. Of annual membership dues, $30 is for a subscription to *Business Officer.*


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